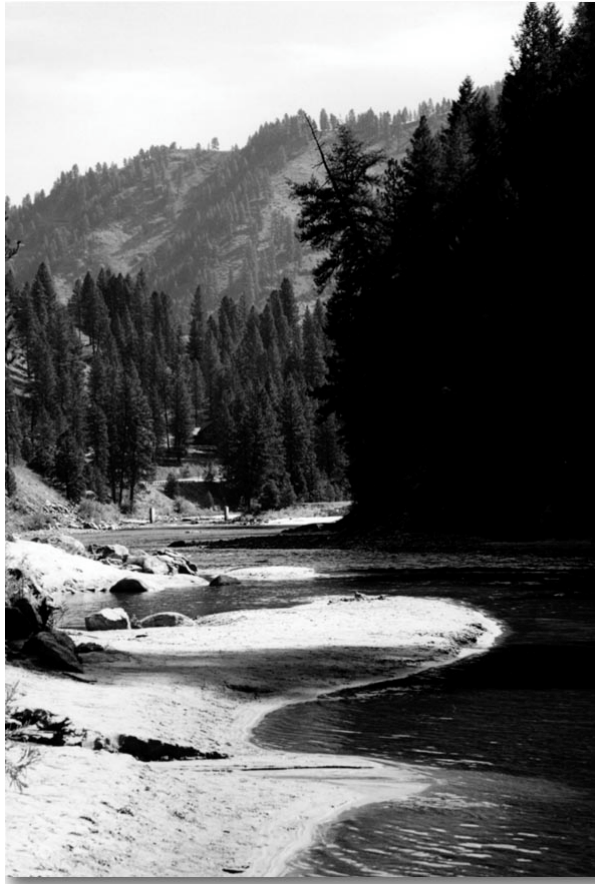


Field Report

Payette River Recreation Complex

■ 1.0 Summary



Segments of the Upper and Lower Payette River that comprise the study area of the Payette River Corridor are located along the Idaho Scenic Byways of Idaho Highway 55 and Idaho Highway 22. Along Idaho Highway 55 the corridor study area stretches from Horseshoe Bend to McCall. Along Idaho Highway 22 the corridor runs from Banks to east of Lowman. River use north of Banks shifts to a more advanced class kayaking and rafting river. In this stretch, few recreational users access the river.

The Highway 55 corridor, in addition to being a scenic byway, serves as a major travel corridor from the Boise area to recreation areas north of Cascade.

Paralleling the Highway 55 corridor from Horseshoe Bend through Cascade is a railroad corridor. The corridor sees limited activity, serving as a spur to the Boise-Cascade mill in Cascade. In the relatively near future the mill will likely close as logging activities migrate to other areas. At that time, the rail corridor will likely be abandoned and transferred to other ownership. Interest in converting the corridor to a bicycle trail have been expressed by the BLM. In addition, however, other groups have expressed interest in using the corridor for a scenic railroad, with the intent to carry people to current and proposed recreation areas near New Meadows. The line is currently used for this purpose along the segment from Cascade to Smith's Ferry. The Thunder Mountain Railroad operates a two-hour passenger tour along the 18-mile stretch, when the line is not being used to transport freight (wood products).

■ 2.0 Background Information

2.1 Location

Located less than an hour north of Boise, the Payette River Recreation Complex is located along the North Fork and South Fork of the Payette River. The portions of the river corridor identified by BLM staff as the primary use areas are displayed in Figure 1. Access points to the river are on parcels of BLM-owned property. The Recreation Complex area runs from the towns of Horseshoe Bend to Cascade on the north fork and main branch of the river and the towns of Banks and Lowman on the south fork of the River.

2.2 Administration and Classification

The Payette River Recreation Complex is managed by the Department of Interior's BLM. The Contact person for the BLM is William G. "Bill" Hagdorn.

2.3 Physical Description

The Payette River Recreation complex is located along the various forks of the Payette River. The terrain is rugged, and the canyon in which the river is located is narrow. The BLM access sites are scattered sporadically along the river. Active recreation uses along the river are concentrated in the segment north of Horseshoe Bend through Banks and along the south fork from Banks to Lowman. The key physical characteristics related to transportation are:

- Idaho Highway 55 winds its way along the north fork and main Payette River. Highway 55 is designated as a scenic byway. North of Horseshoe Bend the Highway 55 corridor is a winding, two-lane highway. This is a major north-south route connecting Boise to the recreational areas to the north.

Figure 1. Payette River Corridor Study Area



- County Highway 17 along the South Fork of the Payette River and shares similar characteristics to Highway 55. County 17 is an alternate route to Idaho Springs from the south.
- An existing railroad line follows the Payette River from north of Horseshoe Bend to Cascade. There has been discussions regarding abandonment of the rail line in the near future. This would open up the opportunity to create a recreational railroad or a bike trail system that follows the Payette River.

2.4 Mission and Goals of Payette River Recreation Complex

Management of the Payette River corridor is shared by the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service. The BLM mission along the corridor include:

- Resource protection; and
- Develop a program of diversified recreation including snowmobiling and cross-country skiing in the winter, to river running, fishing and camping/picnicking in the summer.

2.5 Visitation Levels and Visitor Profile

There are a wide variety of users of the Payette River. Use ranges from recreational swimmers to experienced whitewater rafters and kayakers. Use is governed by the amount of water flowing through the river and by location along the river. According to the BLM's Recreational Management Information System, there were approximately 137,000 recreational users in 1998 in the Payette River Corridor. Peak use is on weekends during the months of July and August.

Use of the corridor is generally comprised of day users from the Boise area.

■ 3.0 Existing Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The BLM lands along the Payette River are connected via Highway 55 and Highway 17. Within each of the corridors, corridor design constraints have created a number of transportation-related concerns:

- There are no shoulders on many of the roadways, limiting bicycle use and creating safety concerns when vehicles are parked adjacent to the roadway.
- There are poor sight lines on the existing highways, making shared use of motor vehicles and cycling dangerous.
- Many of the BLM access points and parking lot areas have significant operational concerns due to poor site lines, limited or no turn lanes and few acceleration/deceleration lanes.
- Idaho Highway 55 serves a number of purposes and, for a two-lane corridor, carries a significant level of traffic. The mix of traffic along the corridor exacerbates safety concerns. The corridor is used for commercial vehicle traffic between Boise and points to the north, recreational vehicle traffic and auto traffic.

3.1 Transportation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

With the heavy use of Highway 55 within the Payette River corridor, there is cause for concern about safely accessing BLM lands along the river. Many of the BLM pull-offs along the highway do not meet desirable design standards for sight distance and auxiliary lanes (see Figure 2). In addition, the area at the confluence of the north and south fork of

the Payette River is a heavy congestion area. Highway 55 and County 17 intersect at the confluence of the Upper and South Fork near Banks. There are also two major parking areas for river users on opposite sides of Highway 55. This creates congestion and an undesirable situation for pedestrians trying to cross Highway 55 unaided (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Highway 55 Various BLM Sites Accesses



Figure 3. Confluence of North and South Forks of Payette River



Within the Payette River corridor from Emmett through New Meadows, use of the U.S. Highway 95 corridor as an alternate to the State Highway 55 has been discussed. The

route has the potential to provide reduced travel time between the Boise area and recreational areas to the north. Should use of the U.S. 95 corridor become the principal corridor from Boise to the north, the Highway 55 corridor could then serve as the river access and scenic corridor.

Transit within the corridor is limited to shuttle buses used by outfitters to transport patrons from river pull-out points back to their vehicles. Currently, leased/owned school buses are used to perform this service.

In addition, the shoulders on Highway 55 are narrow and are not conducive to cycling.

3.2 Community Development Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The town of Horseshoe Bend, on the south end of the Payette River Recreation Complex area, is considered the gateway community to the recreation area. The town is at the beginning stage of defining an economic development plan. Tourism is not promoted in the town and the town does not think of itself as a tourist attraction or stop. There are limited services in town including two gas stations and a few restaurants. There are no hotels in town. The townspeople use BLM land along the river for recreation, specifically the BLM sites just outside of town. There is mixed emotion from the townspeople about the recently started fee demonstration program that the BLM and the U.S. forest Service have started along the Payette River.

3.3 Natural or Cultural Resource Conditions, Issues and Concerns

No specific natural or cultural resource issues or concerns were expressed.

3.4 Recreation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The most significant concern, and opportunity, for recreation along the Payette River is accessibility to the river itself. Users are concerned about the growing level of demand along the river and the cost associated with it. Users want to be able to access the river easily and safely.

In addition to river access, the status of the railroad line paralleling the river after abandonment is a concern. One group advocates a recreational rail line using the existing tracks. This would include dinner trains and scenic train tours. Another group would like a bicycle trail along the existing railroad bed (see Figure 4).

A significant recreational concern throughout the river corridor is the location of camping areas relative to the river. Due to the proximity of a roadway corridor to the river, most camping areas are located on the opposite side of the road from the river. Thus, those desiring river access must walk across the highway, many times at locations of poor site distance or in high traffic areas.

Figure 4. Rail Corridor



4.0 Planning and Coordination

4.1 BLM Plans

On May 16, 1998 the BLM and the Boise National Forest started a fee demonstration program for the Recreation Complex area. There is now a daily or annual fee charged at certain pullouts and recreation areas. The cost is \$3.00 daily or \$30 yearly. This fee program is part of a five-year program started on a trial basis across the nation. The purpose of the fee is to generate revenue to pay for operations, maintenance, and improvements in river access. The fee demonstration program along the Payette River takes recommendation from representatives of the river users as far as where the money should go.

4.2 Public and Agency Coordination

Access to the river is coordinated between the BLM, U.S. Forest Service, local agencies and private outfitters.

■ 5.0 Assessment of Need and System Options

5.1 Magnitude of Need

Needs within the corridor include:

- Enhancement in access to BLM river access sites. Site improvements such as turn lanes, acceleration/deceleration lanes would be a benefit.
- Investigation into the feasibility/cost of acquiring the railroad corridor.
- Improvement/expansion of river access parking areas along the highway corridors.

5.2 Range of Feasible Transit Alternatives

With the dispersed nature of use areas along the river corridor and relatively light visitation, transit is not likely a viable option along the corridor.

5.3 General Transit System Considerations

Transit was not considered a feasible alternative.

■ 6.0 Bibliography

Payette River Recreation Complex Recreation Fee Demonstration Project Annual Report, 1998.

■ 7.0 Persons Interviewed

Bill Hagdorn, Bureau of Land Management

Vicki Lawson, U.S. Forest Service

Bill Ranft, City Council – Horseshoe Bend, Idaho

Christine Jarski – Ida-Ore Planning

Nicole Doval – Gem Community Team, Horseshoe Bend, Idaho